Collaboration key to swift fox recovery

By Brian Kenner

ON SEPTEMBER 13, 2003, one more missing piece of the Great Plains ecosystem was returned to Badlands National Park. Wild-born swift fox (*Vulpes velox*), translocated from Colorado, were released into the park. This curious and unwary housecat-sized fox, once common throughout the short- and mixed-grass portions of the Great Plains from Canada to Mexico, had fallen victim to trapping and poisoning targeted at wolves and coyotes.

A radio-collared swift fox pokes its head out of its artificial den in Badlands National Park, South Dakota. After being captured in Colorado and transported to Badlands, the animals were held two weeks in quarantine and then translocated to a suitable release site in the park.

The swift fox is a state-listed threatened species in South Dakota, and its restoration to the Badlands is a result of collaboration among a variety of interests. The Swift Fox Conservation Team (SFCT), an ad hoc group of private, state, federal, and Canadian biologists, was established to further management and restoration of the species. Contacts made with team members at annual meetings proved essential to Badlands' efforts to restore the fox. Also essential to this project is the park's cadre of biologists and technicians funded by the Natural Resource Challenge to restore the black-footed ferret, who have considerable experience in endangered species restoration.

One SFCT member, the Turner Endangered Species Fund (TESF), began a project to return the swift fox to Ted Turner's Bad River Ranches in South Dakota by translocating 30 wild swift fox in 2002 from healthy populations in Wyoming to the ranches. Using the TESF's experience and expertise, Badlands biologists cooperated with scientists from the USGS Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center and South Dakota State University (part of the Great Plains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit), and obtained funding from the Natural Resource Preservation Program of the USGS Biological Resources Division and the Cooperative Conservation Initiative of the Department of the Interior for a three-year program to capture and release 30 fox per year.

In August 2003, Badlands biologists traveled to Colorado and, with assistance and support from the Colorado Division of Wildlife (another SFCT member), captured 30 swift fox. After a two-week quarantine the animals were released into the park. By December 2003 nine mortalities had occurred. Most of the fox had established themselves in the park and on the surrounding Buffalo Gap National Grassland (the USDA Forest Service is another SFCT member). Large prairie dog complexes and other plentiful rodents and lagomorphs (rabbits and hares) provide the prey base needed for the fox to get established in the area.

Every released fox is radio-collared and will be monitored throughout the year. As the population becomes established and reproduction occurs, park staff will capture and collar the pups to track the population through successive generations. ■

brian_kenner@nps.gov
Chief, Resource Management, Badlands National Park, South Dakota

Interagency implementation of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan

By Elizabeth Crisfield

In 2000, Congress passed the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, a $7.8 billion state and federal partnership. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and South Florida Water Management District initiated project planning and established interagency working relationships to support implementation of the plan. The South Florida Natural Resources Center coordinates National Park Service involvement in this interagency effort, and a number of additional scientists have been hired in response to the center's new restoration responsibilities.

The plan comprises 68 project components that yield benefits for the natural ecosystem while providing for urban and agricultural uses. The components were described conceptually in the plan authorized by Congress, but each will undergo detailed assessments to select a refined combination of structural features and operations. In 2003, detailed planning started for several components near Everglades and Biscayne National Parks where teams of NPS scientists help evaluate alternatives and select environmentally preferred plans.

Final negotiations on the programmatic regulations, which provide detailed guidance on implementation, also took place in 2003. These regulations, authored by the Corps of Engineers, require Department of Interior and State of Florida concurrence. Environmental organizations pushed for a stronger role for the Department of the Interior in the interagency scientific coordinating body described in the regulations. They also lobbied to have interim ecosystem restoration goals included. National Park Service scientists and managers assisted policy makers in evaluating these controversial issues and will continue to work toward accomplishing restoration goals consistent with the mission of protecting national park resources. ■

elizabeth_crisfield@nps.gov
Water Resources Liaison, Everglades National Park and Water Resources Division; Washington, D.C.